

PUBLIC HEALTH FACT SHEET

Cyclospora

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What is cyclospora?

Cyclospora is a parasite (germ) that can make people sick. Cyclospora infection is called cyclosporiasis. Cyclospora is new to most doctors and scientists, so not everything is known about all the ways it can be spread or make people sick. The parasite is too small to see without a microscope.

What are the symptoms of having cyclospora?

The most common symptom is watery diarrhea. Other symptoms can include weight loss, bloating, lots of gas, cramps, nausea, vomiting, being tired, sore muscles, fever, and not feeling hungry. These symptoms can also be caused by a lot of other diseases. Some people who become infected with cyclospora may not get symptoms. Sometimes people who seem to be getting better may get sick again (relapse). For most people, the diarrhea will last for about a few days, but if not treated, some people can be sick for several weeks. It usually takes about 5 to 7 days to get sick after you have eaten a food with cyclospora.

How is cyclospora spread?

The parasite is spread when people eat food or water that has come into contact with infected feces (stool). Cyclospora germs need time (days or even weeks) after being passed in the stool to become able to make a person sick. Because of this, cyclospora infection probably does not spread directly from person to person. It is unknown whether animals can be infected or spread the infection to people.

What kind of foods are likely to have cyclospora?

People have gotten cyclospora infections from some fresh fruits and vegetables that probably came into direct contact with an infected person or contaminated water. Fruits and vegetables grown or packed outside of the United States may have a higher risk of having cyclospora on them. Washing fruits and vegetables with water and a brush may help get rid of cyclospora. Cooking will kill the cyclospora germs. Fruits and vegetables that are peeled should be safe to eat.

How is cyclospora diagnosed and treated?

If you think you have cyclospora, you should see a doctor. Your doctor can take a stool sample and send it to a lab for testing. If you have cyclospora, you may be treated with antibiotics or a combination of antibiotics. If you have diarrhea, you should rest and drink plenty of clear fluids. Do not take any medicine until asking your doctor about it. People who have already had a cyclospora infection can get it again.

Are there any restrictions for people infected with cyclospora?

There are no special restrictions for people diagnosed with cyclospora infection. However, in order to protect the public, people who have diarrhea who work in food-related jobs must stay out of work until they are completely well. Food-related jobs include: working in a restaurant, sandwich shop, hospital kitchen, cafeteria, supermarket or grocery store, dairy or food-processing plant. People who feed, give mouth care, or give medicine to patients or clients in schools, residential programs, day-care, and health facilities could also put the public at risk, and these people must also stay out of work until they are completely well.

How can the spread of cyclospora be prevented?

Careful handwashing helps prevent the spread of cyclospora and other diseases. Always wash your hands after going to the bathroom, changing a diaper, or before touching food. Use plenty of soap and warm water, and get a good soap lather on your hands. Use a lot of friction (rubbing) to loosen and wash away germs.

Where can I get more information?

The Massachusetts Department of Public Health

Division of Epidemiology and Immunization (617) 983-6800 or toll-free at 1-888-658-2850 or on the MDPH website at <http://www.state.ma.us/dph/>

Your local board of health (listed in the phone book under government)

Your family doctor, nurse or health center

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